

Envision Oregon

1000 Friends asks if y'all wants sprawl

With thousands of Measure 37 claims threatening to exacerbate urban sprawl, the state's leading land-use planning advocacy group has called for a town hall meeting in Eugene May 3 to envision the Oregon citizens want.

Bob Stacey, director of 1000 Friends of Oregon, said he hopes to have 100 to 200 local citizens attend the meeting from 6 pm to 9 pm at the UO Recreation Center Bonus Room next to Hayward Field.

Oregon will add 2 million more people in the next 40 years, a big increase from the 2.5 million residents now, Stacey said. The Envision Oregon meetings here and around the state are about "planning for a future that is not disrupted by growth but is strengthened by growth," Stacey said. "What does it mean to have compact community development? Is that what Oregonians want?" he asked.

The meeting will explore changes in the economy with globalization, climate change and higher energy costs, he said. For example, some say agriculture and forestry will not be as important to the state's future, but others say that with higher energy costs, agriculture near our population will become more important.

The 1000 Friends group hopes to use the meeting as a "two-way street" to educate the public and gather feedback that they can pass on to the state Legislature.

The Legislature now has a task force that's working on a bill to address the flood of 7,500 Measure 37 claims to provide compensation or waive development restrictions that protect against sprawl.

Stacey said while the task force's "general thrust is an improvement," he has "mixed feelings" about what's being proposed by the group and would like to see amendments. The proposed legislation would allow quick approval of up to three houses. Larger development would have to prove that regulations caused a loss in land value using a stricter valuation method. Regulation waivers could

be transferred to new owners.

Stacey said fast track approval should be limited to permitting one house, as he believes voters intended in passing Measure 37. He said the stricter valuation method would be based on determining the value of the land before the regulations went into effect, and then inflating that value to the current year. The method, based on a study by an OSU economist, "is the only defensible method," he said.

Such a valuation method would likely result in the denial of many claims, especially the larger ones by corporations and timber companies, Stacey said. But Stacey said that some large claims near cities would still likely go through.

The method would also indirectly take into account the fact that if Measure 37 increases the supply of buildable land beyond current demand, that land is worth less, according to Stacey. "You got to look at the 7,499 other claimants," Stacey said. "Most people didn't have any adverse effect on their value" from regulation.

With the state's 30-year-old land-use planning system, the value of non-developable land in Oregon has increased far faster than inflation, other investments, or similar land in neighboring states, Stacey said. "The idea that our land-use planning has ruined people's lives is hokey," he said.

Stacey said he'd also like to see an amendment to make Measure 37 not apply to future regulations. Land owners already have "big protections" from sudden new land use rules with notice requirements and a provision allowing a six month window allowing builders to use the old rules, he argues. Without changing Measure 37, "a community is never able to change direction" with new rules to respond to changing conditions or popular opinion, he said.

He said passage of the Measure 37 reform package in the Legislature "is predictably going to be tight." Republicans now oppose

the proposal along with the pro-sprawl group Oregonians in Action. OIA has "an ideological opposition to all land-use planning," Stacey said. But Democrats hold a narrow majority, and with thousands of claims nearing deadlines, Stacey said he's "optimistic" that a reform measure could pass by next month.

If the Legislature fails to act soon, Stacey said, "then we expect to see ourselves running a ballot measure in 2007" to reform Measure 37.

The Oregon Supreme Court could also rule that Measure 37 claims aren't transferable to new owners, which could effectively gut most of the big claims. Stacey said he believes the high court is likely to agree with the position two lower courts and the attorney general have taken that claims aren't transferable.

But Stacey said even with such a ruling, there's a risk that developers would get around the restriction. Corporate developers could avoid bank problems the ruling might create

But Stacey said Springfield does have some "legitimate concerns" about the need to update the land supply numbers for the region. However, he said the need to accommodate more housing might be met by increasing density.

Stacey said developers pushed the Legislature to require Portland to update its land supply every five years. The city wants the requirement reset at 10 years and may end up compromising at seven, according to Stacey. Salem and Keizer have regional planning, with the Marion County Commission having the final say, Stacey said. The state LCDC land use agency should also play a stronger role in settling disputes, he said.

Stacey said that if Eugene and Springfield can't agree, the Lane County Commission should decide the sprawl question.

But the County Commission has historically shown little interest in controlling sprawl. A commission vote would also have commissioners who represent rural areas im-

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— BOB STACEY, DIRECTOR OF 1000 FRIENDS OF OREGON

by self-financing their projects. To effectively transfer the waivers to home buyers, real estate lawyers may develop complicated joint venture or other "work-around schemes," he said. "There're still some problems."

The local area has its own land use problems beyond Measure 37. Local developers and the city of Springfield are pushing for a bill in the Legislature to break up coordinated local land use planning. The bill would allow Springfield to sprawl beyond the regional urban growth boundary (UGB) without getting approval from Eugene.

Stacey called the Springfield go-it-alone approach "goofy" for a metropolitan region. "We're in this together, we're talking about the same homes, the same jobs."

posing a costly decision on urban residents.

The region also failed to come together to support a Region 2050 planning process for the area last year. But Stacey said the 2050 plan was looking toward very low density rural sprawl. When it fell apart, "some people were relieved."

The passage of Measure 37 raised the question of whether people still support controlling sprawl in Oregon. But Stacey said the polls show people saying they still support the fair land use planning 1000 Friends envisions for Oregon. "Yeah, government has to treat people fairly, but yeah, we need to have land use planning."

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